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UKRAINE SEEKS *VISHWAGURU* INDIA'S HELP TO RESOLVE WAR

Ukraine's first deputy foreign minister Emine Dzhaparova, who is on a four-day visit to India, said it is important to have India on board

MINISTER IS DEVOTEE OF SRI SATYA SAI BABA

India is a global leader and can help in addressing key global challenges, she said while invoking Prime Minister Narendra Modi's message to Russian President Vladimir Putin last year that 'Today's era is not of war'. "I think India is a global player. It is really a *Vishwaguru*," Dzhaparova said. She has a strong India connect as she considers Sri Satya Sai Baba her spiritual guru | P7

NO COMMENT ON INDIA'S RUSSIAN OIL IMPORT

- Dzhaparova invited New Delhi to join Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's peace formula and the grain initiative
- At the same time, the Ukrainian minister said that Ukraine is not in a position to instruct India on its economic relations with other countries, in an apparent reference to New Delhi's energy ties with Moscow

$1.3 trillion

UKRAINE WAR'S COST TO WORLD ECONOMY IN 2022, SAYS GERMAN ECONOMIC INSTITUTE

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Did security drill scare away tigers ahead of PM Modi's safari?

BOSKY KHANNA @ Bengaluru

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi couldn't spot a single tiger or any big cat while on his 22-km safari in Bandipur Tiger Reserve (BTR) from 7.15 am to 9.30 am on Sunday. The hapless 29-year-old driver of the vehicle the PM travelled in, Madhusudhan, is being blamed and some BJP leaders and senior officials of the forest department have demanded that action be taken against him for not choosing a route where tigers could be spotted. There were also tweets about the registration of the vehicle in which the PM travelled being cancelled.

Interestingly, it has now emerged that the blame almost rests on members of PM's security staff, the Special Protection Group (SPG), the local police, the anti-Naxal force and every other team that went on multiple safaris on the same route for five days before the PM's tour.

A senior BTR official confirmed to The New Indian Express that the teams that were doing rounds on that route for "security purposes" were able to spot tigers on all five days

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to Bandipur Tiger Reserve | EXPRESS

prior to PM's trip. But the PM was able to see only some fresh tiger pugmarks, but no tiger. The members of those security teams reportedly also took pictures of the big cats.

The official said the felines have got used to vehicles moving on that route. Only this time (Sunday), they could have moved to safer and quieter areas when the Prime Minister was in the vehicle driven by Madhusudhan.

"They were eating, sleeping and camping on the identified route. Citing security, they also wanted PM's safari vehicle to be in the middle of the convoy. We had to plead with them that sightings would be the best from the lead vehicle. To check this, the security teams went on additional safari rounds. After they saw tigers and leopards and even photographed them, they were convinced that Modi should be in the lead vehicle," said the official.

The BTR staff had pleaded with the security teams to let the route remain undisturbed on Saturday night so that animal movements were not hindered.

CONTINUED ON: P5

Not an iota of Indian land can be encroached: Shah

Says Centre committed to developing border villages in Arunachal

PRASANTA MAZUMDAR @ Guwahati

UNION Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday obliquely lashed out at China, saying the era when anyone could encroach upon India's border had passed, adding no one dare cast an evil eye on the country's territorial integrity.

He said villagers living near the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China are the first line of defence, which is why the Centre is committed to preventing their outmigration through the Vibrant Villages Programme (VVP).

Launching the VVP scheme at Kibithoo, the first village of India, he said, "Today the entire country can sleep peacefully because of the bravery and sacrifices of our ITBP and Army jawans. It is because of them that nobody can cast an evil eye on us or encroach upon even a needle or nail-tip of our land."

The VVP aims to develop connectivity and infrastructure so as to improve the quality of life of people living in villages near

Union Home Minister Amit Shah at Kibithoo in Arunachal Pradesh, a border village that will be fully developed as part of the Vibrant Villages Programme | PTI

the LAC and strengthen border security. It would be implemented in four states — Arunachal, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand — and Ladakh. In all, 2,967 villages will be covered under it.

"We will take banks there, help people open bank accounts, provide electricity, LPG, drinking water, jobs and build toilets. These villages will be connected digitally and physically with the rest of Arunachal and the country," Shah assured.

Stating that the Centre will complete all of these within the next three years, he said environmental and energy security would also be ensured while tourism would be promoted and local culture and language preserved.

As expected, China criticised Amit Shah's Arunachal visit, stating he violated Chinese sovereignty over the area. "Zangnan (Chinese name for Arunachal) is part of China's territory," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin claimed.

BJP in list dilemma: Joshi says today, CM tomorrow

ASHWINI M SRIPAD @ Bengaluru

THE BJP is yet to release its list of candidates for the Assembly elections in the state, though it held marathon meetings for three consecutive days in Delhi.

The party was expected to release it on Monday. While Union Law Minister Pralhad Joshi said the list will be announced on Tuesday, Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai stated it is likely on Wednesday.

"The list is in its final stage. We had marathon meetings and discussed each Assembly constituency. Union Home Minister Amit Shah is not in Delhi and he is expected to return Tuesday evening. We will hold a meeting with Shah and PM Modi again and then announce the list," Joshi told reporters in Delhi.

However, Bommai, who was also in Delhi, said the list will be released Tuesday late night or Wednesday. "A roadmap for the election was also discussed. BJP has some guidelines and based on that tickets will be given. There are many buzzes, and not all are true," he added.

The BJP has held marathon meetings at district, state and national levels for the past 10 days. After getting the names cleared at the ground level, the ball is now in the national leaders' court.

"It's a democratic exercise. Right from the booth president to the highest parliamentary board approval, it's going through the whole process," a senior BJP leader told The New Indian Express. P4

EXPRESS READ

Amritpal's close aide held in Amritsar

Chandigarh: Radical preacher Amritpal Singh's close aide, Papalpreet Singh, was nabbed in Amritsar district of Punjab and detained under the National Security Act, the police said on Monday. P8

Video row: Dalai Lama apologises to boy

Shimla: The Dalai Lama on Monday apologised to a boy and his family for the "hurt his words may have caused", after a video purportedly showing the Tibetan spiritual head asking him to suck his tongue sparked a row. P8

India headed for sub-par monsoon this yr: Skymet

JITENDRA CHOUBEY @ New Delhi

AFTER four consecutive years of normal and above-normal rains during the monsoon season, India is likely to see deficit in rainfall in 2023 with a 20% chance of drought, private weather forecasting agency Skymet said on Monday.

"Skymet expects the upcoming monsoon to be 'below normal' to the tune of 94% (with an error margin of +/-5%) of the long period average of 868.6 mm for the four-month long period from June to September," it said.

Releasing the monsoon forecast for 2023, the weather agency said there is a 40% chance of the upcoming season being 'below normal', 25% chance of it being 'normal', 15% chance of 'above normal' and zero chance of excess rains.

In its earlier forecast in January, it had predicted the 2023 monsoon to be sub-par — an observation it has reiterated.

The private forecaster expects the northern and central parts of the country to experience rain deficit with Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra witnessing inadequate rains during the core monsoon months of July and August.

Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan and UP — the agricultural bowl of north India — are likely to observe less than normal rains during the second half of the season, it predicted.

Skymet MD Jatin Singh said the return of El Nino — which is associated with heat and dryness in the Asian region — could presage a weaker monsoon this year.

However, the weather agency noted that the Indian Ocean Dipole (a climate condition) could steer monsoon and negate the ill-effects of El Nino when sufficiently strong.

AAP now a nat'l party, TMC, NCP and CPI lose tag

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

THE Election Commission of India on Monday recognised the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) as a national party, while it stripped the Trinamool Congress, Nationalist Congress Party and the Communist Party of India of the coveted tag.

The decision was taken following the review of the parties' performances in various elections held since 2014. With this, India now has six national parties — BJP, Congress, BSP, CPI(M), NPP and AAP.

The election body said the AAP earned the national party status thanks to its performance in Delhi, Goa, Punjab and Gujarat elections. "After its recognition as state party in Gujarat, the party has become recognised state party in four states i.e. Delhi, Goa, Punjab, and Gujarat. Thus, the party fulfilled the eligibility condition for granting recognition as a national party under paragraph 6 B (ii)," read the order issued by the Commission.

It clarified that NCP and Trinamool will be recognised as state parties in Nagaland and Meghalaya, respectively, based on their performance in the assembly elections. Reacting to the development, AAP leader and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said: "Becoming a national party in such a short time is nothing less than a miracle... People expect a lot from us. Today the public has given us this huge responsibility."

In separate orders, the EC also revoked the state party status granted to RLD in Uttar Pradesh, BRS in Andhra Pradesh, PDA (Manipur), PMK (Puducherry), RSP (West Bengal) and MPC (Mizoram).

FIRs against Manimekalai bunched

SHRUTI KAKKAR @ New Delhi

GRANTING further relief to filmmaker **Leena Manimekalai**, the Supreme Court on Monday directed the bunching of all FIRs filed against her in various states for depicting Goddess Kaali as smoking a cigarette in a poster of her film *Kaali*, and transferring them to the Delhi Police.

Multiple FIRs had been lodged against her in Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Delhi.

A bench of Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud and justices P S Narasimha and J B Pardiwala, while extending its interim order protecting her from coercive action, also gave her the liberty to approach the Delhi High Court for quashing the FIRs.

On January 20, while granting her interim protection, the bench had said the FIRs would cause serious prejudice to her.

Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, appearing for the Centre, sought directions to her for appearing before a court in connection with the FIRs. "This is all about one film and moreover she is a US citizen and she can appear virtually before the court, if required," the CJI said.

In her plea filed through advocate Indira Unninayar, Manimekalai argued that the multiple FIRs had infringed on her right to freedom of speech and expression.

Bengal violence pre-planned, says Calcutta HC, criticises intel failure

PRONAB MONDAL @ Kolkata

THE Calcutta High Court on Monday observed that the recent Ram Navami violence in Howrah's Shibpur and Dalkhola in North Dinajpur was on the face of it pre-planned. It castigated the state government for complete intelligence failure.

Responding to a petition filed by leader of Opposition Suvendu Adhikari seeking an NIA probe, the court indicated it could order a central agency to do so.

A division bench comprising acting Chief Justice T S Sivagnaman and Justice Hiranmay Bhattacharyya made the observations but reserved their order.

"Internet suspension usually takes place when there has been an external danger or infiltration etc. But for a religious procession, we don't understand why. Sudden violence is when people are walking and there is an altercation etc. But your (state's) prima facie show these (violence) were pre-planned. There are allegations of stones being hurled from rooftops. Obviously it is not possible for anyone to take stones up to the rooftop within 10 to 15 minutes," Chief Justice Sivagnaman said.

The bench asked the state government to explain who benefited and who were affected by the violence. "The problem is two-fold. One, there is tension between two groups. The other is a third group taking advantage of enmity between two groups. This needs to be probed. We believe a central agency can probe this aspect better," Chief Justice Sivagnaman said.

Advocate general S N Mukherjee claimed the state police was properly investigating the case. "The participants of the procession was armed with lathis, swords, etc, which they were not allowed to carry. The other side was also armed with weapons," he said.

DIDI HITS OUT AT BJP OVER RAM NAVAMI RIOTS

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee criticised the BJP, saying its members were part of the Ram Navami processions. "Why arms were part of a religious procession? Many were brought from outside," she alleged. The CM also rapped an NGO that send a fact-finding team to probe the riots

'LUCK' NO RCB

Lucknow Super Giants batsman Nicholas Pooran clears the fence on his way to 62 off 19 balls during the IPL 2023 match against Royal Challengers Bangalore in Bengaluru on Monday. LSG beat RCB by one wicket | VINOD KUMAR T | P11

BID TO MOO-VE VOTERS

Ahead of Assembly elections, Opposition tries to milk KMF issue to fullest

Police detain a pro-Kannada activist protesting against Amul in Bengaluru on Monday | SHASHIDHAR BYRAPPA

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

IT is a controversy that has fallen on the lap of opposition parties and they are milking it to the fullest ahead of the state going to the polls on May 10.

Though it started with Union Home Minister Amit Shah asking Amul and the Karnataka Milk Federation to cooperate with each other, opposition parties have dubbed it as an attempt by the BJP government in the state to weaken the local milk cooperative.

Congress took it a notch higher on Monday when party state president DK Shivakumar visited a Nandini outlet at Hassan in the morning and bought milk and other KMF products. Even as TV cameras and media persons milled around him, he said, "People should buy Nandini milk and other KMF products to support and save farmers and milk producers of Karnataka. The duty of a state government is to protect lakhs of families that depend on milk cooperative societies."

By turning it into an issue concerning the livelihoods of milk farmers, Congress would hope to see gains at the hustings. JDS, which sees itself as a party working for farmer welfare, too has been slamming the government over ignoring ryots. Trying desperately to counter the snowballing controversy, Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai hit out at opposition leaders, saying, "Congress and JDS leaders are indulging in low-level politics by trying to spread lies about KMF's 'Nandini' brand to create confusion among farmers and the general public."

But the narrative that is building on the ground seems to be in favour of the stand taken by opposition parties. Many organisations, like the hoteliers' body on Sunday and apartment residents association on Monday, have said they will not use any other product, except that of Nandini, to show solidarity with dairy farmers in the state. Amid the din, the KMF rubbished apprehensions over its merger with another bigger milk cooperative and called it a rumour. "The KMF is the second biggest cooperative milk federation producing 85 lakh litres of milk each day procured from 26 lakh farmers. The federation plans to increase procurement to 1 crore litres per day," said a statement from the KMF MD. But the message seemed to be lost amid the political din. The question now is who will gain the most from the controversy: The opposition or the ruling party? P2,4